

METHOD FOR PROCESSING IMAGES OF CORONARY ARTERIES

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to angiographic imaging.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

There are many instances when it is desirable to have a stereoscopic view of the coronary arteries. For example, an intraluminal device such as a balloon or stent must be navigated through the coronary arterial tree to a diseased location in an artery. Stereoscopic monitoring of the location of the device in the arterial tree assists the angiographer in navigating the device through the coronary tree.

In order to obtain a stereoscopic view of the coronary arteries, it is known to obtain two two-dimensional images of the arteries from different perspectives. The two images are then presented to a viewer for stereoscopic viewing as is known in the art.

Angiographic imaging of the coronary arteries involves introducing a radio-opaque substance into one or more coronary arteries. An x-ray source is directed to the heart. An x-ray recorder, such as x-ray film or an x-ray camera, located behind the heart thus records an image of the coronary arteries from this perspective. To obtain a second image from another perspective, the x-ray source and recorder may be rotated about the heart to a new position and a second image of the coronary arteries obtained. It is also known to produce a pair of images of the coronary arteries from different perspectives without moving the x-ray source or recorder by taking advantage of the fact that when the heartbeats, it rotates slightly. A cineangiographic system having a stationary x-ray video camera is used to produce and record a sequence of images of the coronary arteries over at least one

systole-diastole or diastole-systole transformation of the heart. A pair of images in the video record is then selected from the sequence presenting images of the coronary arteries from different perspectives due to rotation of the heart. However, the angular displacement of the perspectives of the two images cannot be greater than the rotational angle of the heart in a single diastole-systole or systole-diastole transformation. (about 1°). This small angular displacement of the two perspectives does not produce a satisfactory stereoscopic effect.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In order to understand the invention and to see how it may be carried out in practice, a preferred embodiment will now be described, by way of non-limiting example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figs. 1a and 1b are images of human coronary arteries obtained from a single camera position but from different perspectives due to rotation of the heart; and

Fig. 1c is a superimposition of two images obtained by processing the images of Figs. 1a and 1b in accordance with the invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides a method for processing a pair of initial images of the coronary arteries obtained from different perspectives in order to enhance the stereoscopic effect perceived by an observer of the images. The pair of images to be processed may have been obtained from two perspectives of the body. Alternatively, the pair of images may have been obtained from a single perspective of the body but showing different perspectives of the coronary arteries due to rotation of the heart.

Each image in the initial pair of images is described by means of an intensity function $I(x,y)$ which gives the intensity of the image at the pixel (x,y) . The image is considered as lying in the xy plane in a three dimensional system of

coordinates (x,y,z), and representing a projection of the coronary arteries onto this plane.

In accordance with the invention, the boundary of the heart in each image is used to generate a function $z(x,y)$ describing the heart surface over the xy plane. The image $I(x,y)$ is then processed to produce a processed image having an intensity function $I'(x,y)$ where, for each pixel (x,y), $I'(x,y)$ is obtained in a calculation involving $I(x,y)$ and $z(x,y)$.

In a preferred embodiment, a function $z(x,y)$ describing an ellipsoidal surface is used. The ellipsoidal surface has a first axis and a second axis equal to, and coinciding with, the length and width, respectively, of the heart in the plane of the image. The third axis of the ellipsoid, representing the depth of the heart in a direction perpendicular to the plane of the image, is obtained from either the first or second axis based upon the proportions of a normally shaped heart. The depth may be taken, for example, as 0.3 to 0.8 times the length of the first axis.

In the most preferred embodiment, the intensity $I'(x,y)$ of the processed image at the pixel (x,y) is obtained from the function $z(x,y)$ representing an ellipsoidal heart surface and the intensity $I(x,y)$ of the initial image according to the algebraic expression

$$I'(x,y) = \left[\frac{z(x,y)}{\alpha} + 1 \right] I(x,y),$$

where α is a selectable scaling factor.

Once the two initial images have been processed in accordance with the invention, the processed images may be presented to an observer for stereoscopic viewing by any method known in the art. For example, one image may be presented in a red and black format while the second image is presented in a green and black format. In this case, the observer is provided with a pair of eye glasses that in use place a red filter and a green filter over the eye that is to view the red and green image, respectively. Alternatively, the two processed images may be displayed using polarized light where the planes of the polarized light of the two images are perpendicular to each other and the images are viewed with

glasses having perpendicular polarizers. A stereoscopic screen may also be used for stereoscopic viewing of the images.

Figs. 1a and 1b are initial images of human coronary arteries obtained from a single perspective of the body. The two images were obtained at different stage of the heartbeat, so that the two perspectives of the heart are separated by an angle of about 1°. The two images were processed according to the invention using the equation:

$$I'(x, y) = \left[\frac{z(x, y)}{\alpha} + 1 \right] I(x, y),$$

where

$$z(x, y) = c \sqrt{1 - \left(\frac{x^2}{a^2} \right) - \left(\frac{y^2}{b^2} \right)}$$

with $\alpha = 0.7$ and $a = 1.2b = 2c$

Fig. 1c shows a superimposition of the two processed images. The superimposition may be constructed so that one processed image in the superimposition is red and black, while the other is green and black. The superimposition can then be viewed using a pair of eyeglasses having a red filter to cover one eye and a green filter to cover the other eye. Alternatively, the images could be presented on a screen with polarized light, with the planes of polarization of the two images being perpendicular to each other, and the screen viewed with eyeglasses having appropriate polarizers. The images may also be viewed on a stereoscopic viewing screen.

It will also be understood that the system according to the invention may be a suitably programmed computer. Likewise, the invention contemplates a computer program being readable by a computer for executing the method of the invention. The invention further contemplates a machine-readable memory tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine for executing the method of the invention.

In its first aspect the invention provides a method for processing an initial image of coronary arteries, the initial image given by an intensity function $I(x,y)$ defined on a set of pixels (x,y) , so as to produce a processed image of the coronary arteries having an intensity function $I'(x,y)$, comprising steps of:

- 5 (a) obtaining a function $z(x,y)$ describing a heart surface over the initial image; and
- (b) calculating the intensity function I' based upon the function z .

By another aspect the invention provides a program storage device readable by machine, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by
10 the machine to perform method steps for processing a first initial digital image of coronary arteries and a second initial digital image of the coronary arteries, the first and second digital having been obtained from different perspectives of the coronary arteries, so as to produce a first processed image and a second processed image, the method comprising steps of:

- 15 (a) processing the first initial digital image by the method of the invention; and
- (b) processing the second digital image by the method of the invention.

Still further the invention provides a computer program product comprising a computer useable medium having computer readable program
20 coded embodied therein for processing a first initial digital image of coronary arteries and a second initial digital image of the coronary arteries, the first and second digital images having been obtained from different perspectives of the coronary arteries, so as to produce a first processed image and a second processed image, the computer program product comprising:

- 25 computer readable program code for causing the computer to process the first initial digital image by the method of the invention; and

 computer readable program code for causing the computer to process the second digital image by the method of the invention.